



HEALTH CARE AGENCY

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Avian Influenza Alert

To: Emergency Departments
Infection Control Practitioners
Physicians

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Avian Influenza (H5N1) in Asia

Influenza A (H5N1) virus has been identified from specimens from 3 patients (2 children and 1 adult) who died of severe respiratory illness in late December and early January in Vietnam. Since the end of October 2003, 14 persons have been hospitalized in or near Hanoi with severe respiratory illness, with 12 deaths (11 children and 1 adult, the mother of a deceased child). It is not known if all of these cases were caused by the same pathogen. Investigations into the source of infection and possibilities of human-to-human transmission are underway.

Outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1) have occurred in poultry in Vietnam, South Korea, and Japan this winter, leading to the deaths and culling of thousands of chickens. Pigs and ducks have also reportedly been infected. For more information about the avian influenza outbreaks in Asia, please see the WHO website <http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/>

Influenza A (H5N1) was first seen in humans in 1997 in Hong Kong where it was associated with 18 cases and 6 deaths. No further human cases had been reported after the massive culling of all chickens in Hong Kong in December 1997. Another outbreak of H5N1 in February 2003 caused 2 human cases and 1 death in Hong Kong. Other avian strains caused one human death and mild illness in 83 humans (influenza A H7N7) in the Netherlands in April 2003 and mild illness in children (influenza A H9N2) in Hong Kong in 1999 (2 cases) and December 2003 (one case).

While additional investigations of the newly confirmed H5N1 cases in Vietnam are ongoing, we continue to recommend that any patient hospitalized for influenza or unexplained severe respiratory illness, ARDS or pneumonia AND a history of travel to Asia in the 10 days before illness onset have appropriate specimens collected for testing including **viral culture** of nasopharyngeal and throat swabs.

Call Orange County Epidemiology at 714-834-8180 to arrange for testing.